

Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

LOST SISTER

1

In China,
even the peasants
named their first daughters
Jade—

5 the stone that in the far fields
could moisten the dry season,
could make men move mountains
for the healing green of the inner hills
glistening like slices of winter melon.

10 And the daughters were grateful:
they never left home.

To move freely was a luxury
stolen from them at birth.
Instead, they gathered patience,

15 learning to walk in shoes
the size of teacups,
without breaking—
the arc of their movements
as dormant as the rooted willow,
20 as redundant as the farmyard hens.

But they traveled far
in surviving,
learning to stretch the family rice,
to quiet the demons,

25 the noisy stomachs.

2

There is a sister
across the ocean,
who relinquished¹ her name,
diluting jade green

30 with the blue of the Pacific.

¹ *relinquished* — gave up; surrendered

Rising with a tide of locusts,
she swarmed with others
to inundate another shore.
In America,
35 there are many roads
and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness,
the possibilities,
the loneliness,
40 can strangulate like jungle vines.
The meager provisions and sentiments
of once belonging—
fermented roots, Mah-Jongg² tiles and firecrackers—
set but a flimsy household
45 in a forest of nightless cities.
A giant snake rattles above,
spewing black clouds into your kitchen.
Dough-faced landlords
slip in and out of your keyholes,
50 making claims you don't understand,
tapping into your communication systems
of laundry lines and restaurant chains.

You find you need China:
your one fragile identification,
55 a jade link
handcuffed to your wrist.
You remember your mother
who walked for centuries,
footless—
60 and like her,
you have left no footprints,
but only because
there is an ocean in between,
the unremitting space of your rebellion.

—Cathy Song

² *Mah-Jongg* — a game played with small pieces called tiles